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Crime and Justice Statistics Across Nations

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Background and introduction

In the second half of the 20th century criminologists became sensitized to the cultural and legal relativity of the concept of crime. Court and police statistics on crime came to be seen as social constructions, not necessarily reflecting an objective reality of crime. More specifically, criminologists became aware that police figures are heavily influenced by national legal definitions, recording practices of the police and the readiness of victims to report their experiences to the police. Considering the variation in these definitions and practices across countries, these insights were the kiss of death for comparative international criminology. Between 1970 and 2000 only very few studies comparing levels of crime of different countries were conducted not true – 65 with INTERPOL data alone, not counting other datasets. This was a time of flourishing quantitative cross-national crime research. See Barberet, 2009 in Intl. J. of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice. For modern criminologists the epidemiological approach seemed to end.

Two factors have spurned a revival of international comparative criminological research. First, administrative statistics of police forces, courts and prisons have in most developed countries been fully computerized, thereby enhancing both the completeness and reliability of official statistics on crime and justice. Statistics on numbers of police officers, recorded homicides, convictions and prisoners are currently available for scholarly analysis from a large number of countries (refer *www. UNODC/statistics; www.wodc.nl (European Sourcebook); www.world prisonlist.uk*). Secondly, many governments have commissioned regular sample surveys among the public on their experiences with victimizations by common crime (crime victimization surveys). The resulting survey-based statistics, reflecting problems of crime as perceived by the public at large, provide a new source of information on crime and attitudes toward crime and justice. Questionnaires and other methods of standardized victimization surveys are well-suited for comparative purposes *(http://rechten.uvt.nl/ICVS).*

This chapter presents a sample of results of the new generation of empirical studies in comparative international criminology. First, survey-based data on the available measures of conventional or common criminality are presented, commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of international police figures and results of crime victimization surveys for comparative work. The next section presents comparative, international data on complex, non-conventional crimes such as organized crime and corruption. Thirdly, prisoner rates from a large number of countries are presented, one of the few international statistics on the operation of criminal justice systems that can reliably be used for comparisons. The final section briefly discusses some emerging theoretical perspectives on the determinants of crime and on penal policies in an international, comparative perspective.

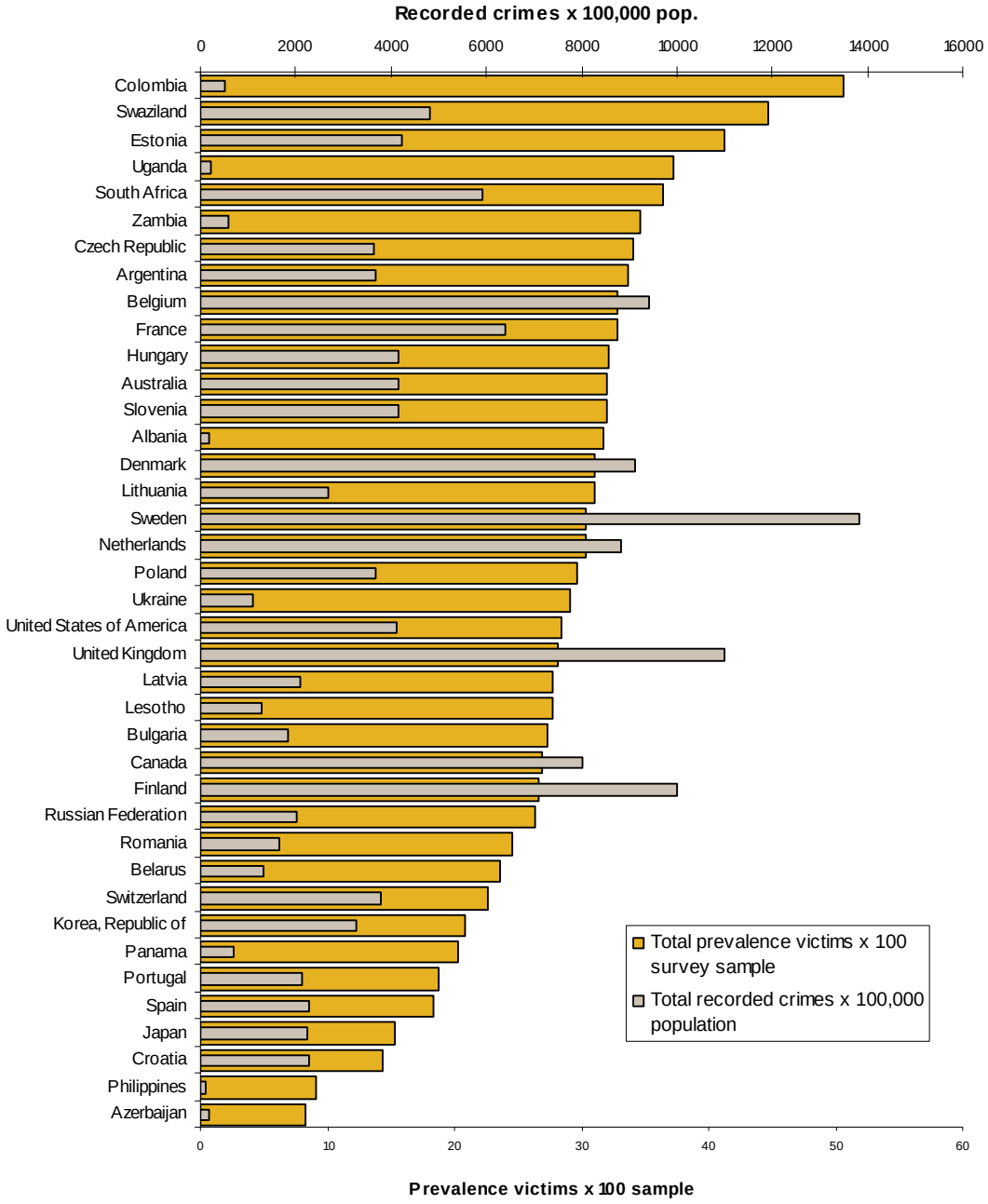
Police figures and victimization rates

Victimization surveys have primarily been designed as a source of statistical information on the volume and trends of common crime collected independently from police records. The surveys yield estimates of the total numbers of crime experienced by the public (*victimization rates*), which can be compared with numbers of officially recorded offences. Several developed countries conduct independent annual victimization surveys at a national scale, including Australia, England & Wales, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA. In the case of the International Crime Victim Surveys (ICVS), data about crime at the macro level is collected in a standardized way to allow comparisons across countries. The first round of ICVS surveys was in 1989, followed by surveys in 1992, 1996 and 2000. The last round of surveys was completed in 2004 and 2005. For full results and detailed information on the methods of the ICVS we refer to the reports with key findings (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, & Smit, 2008).

The ICVS results provide an opportunity to study concurrence between the survey-based ranking and those according to international police figures. Howard and Smith (2003) examined the relationships between police figures of the UN Crime Survey, European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics and Interpol and between these three official measures of crime and ICVS victimization rates. Their analysis was limited to Europe and North America. Their results show that for the group of countries under study, official measures collected by the UN, the European Sourcebook or Interpol are reasonably consistent amongst themselves but show little or no resemblance to rankings based on victimization survey research among the public. They also concluded that analyses of the social correlates of crime showed fundamentally different, even opposing results, depending on the data sources used, thus putting in doubt most of the existing knowledge on the macro-causes of crime based on official crime data.

A further test of the usefulness of recorded crime as a measure of the relative level of crime should include data on countries from all regions of the world and not just from Europe and North America. Both the UN crime survey and the ICVS contain a measure for ‘total crime’. For 39 countries data are available on the overall ICVS victimization per 100 respondents in 2000 and the total numbers of crimes per 100,000 recorded by the police in 2002. Figure 1 depicts both the number of recorded crimes per 100,000 inhabitants and the percentage of the public victimized by crime according to the ICVS (Van Dijk, 2007).

Figure 1 – Total crime, by countries
(sources: ICVS 2000 and UN Crime Survey 2002 or latest data available)



In the 39 countries with information from both sources, on average 28% of the respondents to the ICVS were victims of at least one crime of those included in the survey. Victimization rates in the majority of countries (23) were close to the average (between 23 and 33%), while six were well below (Azerbaijan, Philippines, Croatia, Japan, Spain and Portugal) and ten markedly above. Among them, the countries where citizens were most frequently victimised were Colombia, Swaziland, Estonia, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and the Czech Republic. In contrast, the highest levels of police-recorded crime were observed in Sweden, United Kingdom, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands and Canada, while in Colombia, Uganda and Zambia, which as

just mentioned appeared in the group of countries with the highest rates of victimization, police-recorded levels of crime are comparatively low. It can be observed that four out of six countries with the highest victimization rates were in Africa, while among the six countries with the highest levels of police-recorded crime five belong to the 15 member states of the European Union before enlargement.

From a European perspective, it is worth noting that new members of the European Union, such as Rumania, Bulgaria and Lithuania, show relatively low police figures and moderately high victimization rates. This finding suggests that dark numbers are comparatively high among these former communist nations. In these countries victims are less inclined to report crimes to the police and recording practices are relatively restrictive.

The results show that there is no correlation between the actual level of victimization by crime and the rates of crime recorded by the police among these 39 countries ($r=0.212$; $n=39$; n.s.). Some countries with exceptionally high numbers of recorded crimes also show comparatively high victimization rates (South Africa) but many others, such as Finland, Canada and Switzerland, do not. The comparison of these two measures shows that rates of total recorded crimes cannot be reliably used as measures of common crime in a comparative perspective. In response to these criticisms INTERPOL has decided to withdraw its long running series of international police figures from its public websites. Since homicide statistics are less strongly affected by differences in legal definitions, reporting patterns and recording practices, they (produced by which agency?) continue to be used for comparative analyses (LaFree & Tseloni, 2006). For comparisons of other types of crimes, results of standardized victimization surveys are the preferred source.

Trends in common crime

Hereunder,data from the most recent round of the ICVS conducted in 2004/2005 in 30 industrialized countries and six main cities in developing countries are presented. Almost 16% of the population of the 30 participating countries has been a victim of any crime in 2004. The overall victimization rates per country are shown in figure 2. The four countries with the highest overall prevalence victimization rates in 2004 are Ireland, England & Wales, New Zealand and Iceland. Other countries with comparatively high victimization rates are Northern Ireland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Mexico, Switzerland and Belgium. All of these countries have overall victimization rates that are statistically significantly higher than the average of the 30 participating countries. The USA, Canada, Australia and Sweden show rates near the average. Compared to past results, these countries have dropped several places in the ranking on overall victimization. Countries with victimization levels just under the mean include Norway, Poland, Bulgaria, Scotland, Germany, Luxembourg and Finland. Lowest levels were found in Spain, Japan, Hungary, Portugal, Austria, France, Greece and Italy. The latter eight countries all have victimization levels significantly below the average of participating countries. They can be regarded as low crime countries in this context. This group is fairly heterogeneous, both geographically and in terms of affluence (GDPPC). Finland, Greece and Poland are comparatively less urbanized than other European countries.

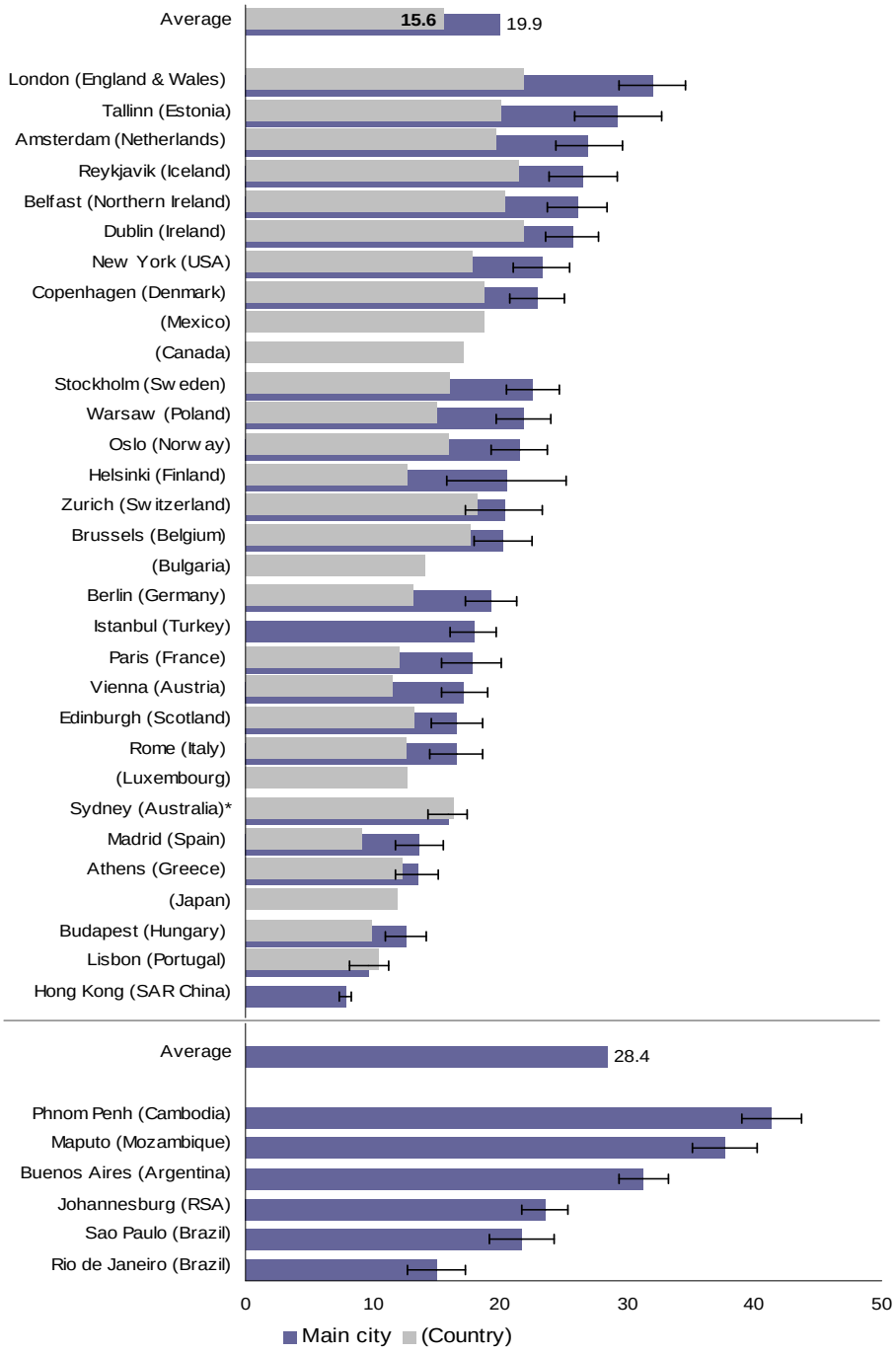
Figure 2 also displays the results of surveys conducted in 32 main cities concerning victimization by any crime. The results confirm that levels of victimization by common crime are universally higher among city populations than among national populations. Lisbon forms the only exception to this criminological rule. The mean victimization rate of the participating cities in developed

countries is 19.9%, whereas the mean national rate was 15.8%. In almost all countries, risks to be criminally victimized are a quarter to a third higher for main city inhabitants than for others.

On average, city rates are higher in developing countries (28.4%) than in developed countries (19.9%). This difference is most pronounced for victimization by personal crimes, especially robbery (Van Dijk, 2007 is Dijk, 2007 not the correct way to cite your work?). The 20004/2005 ranking of cities in terms of victimization puts Phnom Penh and Maputo on top. Relatively high rates are also found in London and Buenos Aires. Tallinn, Amsterdam, Reykjavik, Belfast, Dublin and Johannesburg have rates above the global mean. Victimization rates near the global city average of 21.7% are found in New York, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Sao Paulo and Oslo. The five participating cities with the lowest victimization rates are Hong Kong, Lisbon, Budapest, Athens and Madrid.

Trend data over the past twenty years are available for 15 Western countries. Overall trends in victimization show a curved trend since 1988 with a peak in the early or mid 1990s. The survey also showed that levels of fear of property crime are declining together with victimization rates and that levels of satisfaction with the police among the general public have gone up. The latest round of the ICVS confirms that most Western countries have emerged from a decade long crime epidemic and that the public starts to become aware that this is indeed the case.

Figure 2 Overall victimization for ten crimes; one year prevalence rates in 2003/04 (percentages) of capital cities and national populations of 28 countries.2002 – 2005 ICVS*



* The Australian victimization rate is based on 9 crimes; Sexual offences were not included; the overall victimization is one percent point lower as a result.

Measuring organized crime with the use of statistical indicators.

One important limitation of victimization surveys. including the ICVS, is their focus on common crimes victimizing ordinary citizens. No information is collected about other types of crime

harming the community rather than individual persons, such as environmental crimes, organized crime and high level corruption. Developing indicators for these crimes is a further challenge for comparative criminology.

The first requirement of measuring organized crime in an international context is agreement on its definition Although definitions in national law show great variation, criminologists describe organized crime as criminal activities for material benefit by groups that engage in extreme violence, corruption of public officials, including law enforcement and judicial officers, penetration of the legitimate economy (e.g. through racketeering and money-laundering) and interference in the political process These elements are not only incorporated in anti-mafia laws of some countries, including the USA, Italy and Hungary, but are also used as operational definitions by the FBI and the European police community.

One of the most common types of organized crime is racketeering including the collection of protection money from businesses. Through victimization surveys among business executives, reliable information can be collected on the extent of extortion practices in business communities in different countries. Since 1997 the World Economic Forum (WEF) has carried out annual surveys among business executives of larger companies to identify obstacles to businesses, which includes a question on the prevalence in the country of organized crime defined as "mafia-oriented racketeering, extortion" (World Economic Forum, 2003 and 2004/*www.worldeconomic forum*). Data are available on the prevalence of organized crime according to business executives of 102 countries. An analysis was conducted of the results from the seven rounds of WEF surveys conducted between 1997 and 2003. National scores proved to be very consistent across years. To reduce sampling error, the scores of the annual surveys were averaged. The resulting mean scores for 1997-2003 are based on sample sizes of 500 or more. The national scores reflect the perceived prevalence of organized crime in the period 1997 to 2003 according to business executives.

Another source of cross-national data on perceived organized crime is risk assessments made by international consultancy companies. The London-based consultancy company, Merchant International Group (MIG), assesses investment risks in over 150 countries, including the prevalence of different types of organized crime (MIG, 2004)[1]. The risk assessments concerning organized crime from MIG were found to be strongly correlated to the perceptions of business executives of the WEF surveys. To facilitate further statistical exploration, a composite index was constructed based on the averaged rankings of countries on the WEF surveys of 1997 to 2003 and the assessments of organized crime prevalence of MIG. The resulting Organized Crime Perception Index (OCPI) refers to the level of different types of organized crime activities, such as extortion and drugs, arms and people trafficking, as perceived by potential victim groups and/or independent experts.

As mentioned above, instrumental violence, corruption of public officials and money-laundering are regarded as other defining characteristics of organized crime. It is indeed hard to imagine a country where organized crime is rampant without significant amounts of these three mafia-related phenomena. Statistical indicators were selected for the prevalence of each of these three defining characteristics of organized crime. Police-recorded homicides can be roughly divided into emotional attacks on intimates and cool-blooded killings executed by organized crime. The perpetrators of the first category are in most cases arrested. The perpetrators of the second

[1] The Merchant International Group Limited's monthly Global Risk Trends include information on trends in corruption and organized crime in selected countries (*www.merchantinternational.com).*

category are not. To develop a proxy measure of 'mob-related violence', rates of unsolved homicides were calculated by deducting numbers of convictions for homicide from the numbers of police-recorded homicides[2]. The resulting country rates of unsolved murders per 100,000 population were found to be fairly strongly correlated to the national scores on the Organized Crime Perception Index ($r = .57$; $n=63$; $p<0.05$). Similarly, a proxy indicator of "high level corruption'' was derived from studies of the World Bank Institute and indicators of money-laundering and the extent of the black economy were taken from the World Economic Forum surveys among business executives. All three indicators proved to be strongly correlated to the scores on the Organized Crime Perception Index as well. These findings support the construction of a composite organized crime index combining the five interrelated proxy indicators: perceived prevalence of organized crime, especially racketeering, unsolved homicides, grand corruption, money-laundering and the extent of the black economy.

Table 1 depicts the mean scores on the Composite Organized Crime Index of world regions. To allow a more detailed diagnosis of regional problems with organized crime, the picture presents both the absolute scores of regions on the composite index as well as the rank numbers on the five source indicators used.

[2] Both types of data were drawn from the seventh round of the crime and criminal justice surveys of UNODC.

Table 1. Regional mean scores on Composite Organized Crime Index (COCI) and data on source indicators : perceived organized crime prevalence, grand corruption, money-laundering, extent of shadow economy and the rates of unsolved murders per 100,000 population

	Average of the composite organized crime index	Organized crime perception (rank)	Informal sector (rank)	Unsolved homicides (rank)	High level corruption (rank)	Money laundering (rank)
Oceania	33	1	1	1	2	1
West and Central Europe	35	2	2	2	4	3
North America	44	4	4	4	6	4
East and South East Asia	45	5	3	7	3	6
Central America	50	4	13	3	8	13
Near and Middle East	50	7	6	11	1	2
World	54					
South Asia	54	13	8	8	7	11
North Africa	55	6	5	6		5
East Africa	55	11	9		11	9
Southern Africa	56	9	12	5	12	10
South America	58	10	14	10	13	12
SouthEast Europe	58	14	10	12	9	14
West & Central Africa	60	12	11	15	5	8
East Europe	70	16	16	14	14	16
Central Asia and Transcaucasian	70	15		13	15	
Caribbean	70	8	15		16	15

Items and sources used : *Organized crime perception (World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Reports, Business Executive Surveys, 1997-2003; Merchant International Group, 2004 ; Beeps, 2004); Money-laundering and Informal sector (Business Executive Survey, WEF, 2004); High Level Corruption (Kaufmann, Kraay, Mastruzzi, 2003), Unsolved Homicides (UN Survey on Crime and Justice, 2002: www.UNODC.org).*

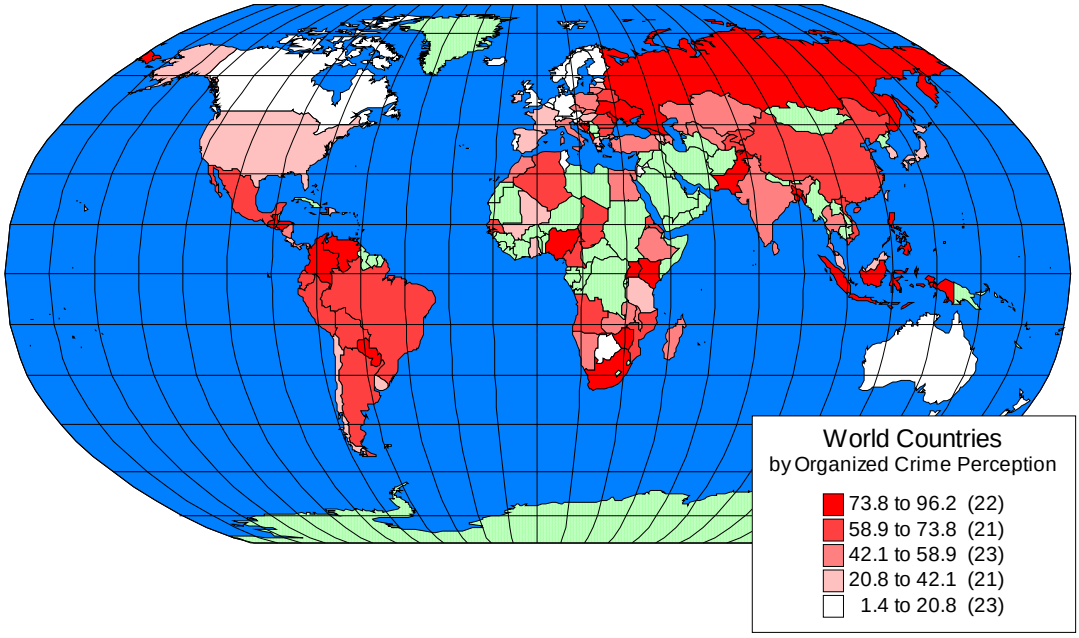
The ranking of regions according to the composite index and those according to the five constituting indicators show a high degree of consistency. Outliers are the relatively high rank numbers on informal sector and money-laundering of Central America. Among the high crime regions, West and Central Africa show relatively low rank numbers on homicides. The latter result could point to a shortcoming in the available statistics - homicide statistics for Nigeria are, for example, missing. It could also reflect that organized crime groups in the region are less prone than elsewhere to the use of extreme violence.

Country scores

The combination of data from different sources allows the calculation of scores for a large number of individual countries. The rank numbers of countries for different indicators are mostly in the same range as the COCI rank, but many deviations can be found. Deviations of single indicators from the COCI rank can point to specific features of organized crime in the country or to deficiencies in some of the measures[3]. In some cases the diagnosis at the country level can only be very tentative due to lack of sufficient information on the source indicators, notably on the numbers of unsolved homicides.

Figure 3 shows the global map of organized crime, based on the organized crime perception index.

Figure 3 Global maps with scores on organized crime perception index



As said, the rates of individual countries should not be taken at face value, but be used as a basis for further enquiry. In Asia rates are the worst in parts of South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh). But also China and India are rated unfavourably (even more than Italy with its notorious problems in the South). In the international literature on organized crime India is rarely the focus of attention. Research on Chinese organized crime is mainly focussed on Chinese expatriates. Limited available research findings on homeland China point to collusion between corrupt communist party members and local gangs in remote areas (Zhang, 2002). More research on the role of the organized crime-corruption in these two emerging superpowers seems warranted.

In Africa, Nigeria, Angola and Mozambique stand out with the highest scores. Nigerian organized crime activity in both the country and the region has been well-documented (UNODC, 2005). A detailed account of how organized crime threatens to penetrate state and businesses in Southern Africa, notably in Mozambique, is given in Gastrow (2003). In Latin America, Haiti, Paragua, Guatamala, Venezuela and Colombia show the highest scores. High scores are also observed in Jamaica. None of these scores will come as a surprise to informed readers.

Within Europe, organized crime prevalence increases diagonally from the North West to the South East, with levels being low in England and Germany, higher in Spain and Italy and by far the highest in Russia, Albania and Ukraine. The annual surveys of the World Economic Forum point at incremental improvements in some of the new member states of the European Union.

Trends in prisoner rates

Statistics on the operations of the criminal justice system are strongly influenced by legal definitions and procedural technicalities determining the processing of cases through the system. This feature greatly complicates meaningful international comparisons. One of the statistics that seems relatively unaffected by legal niceties of national laws and systems is the number of detainees as a rough indicator of the punitiveness of criminal justice across countries. On the basis of the figures of the World Prison List, collated by British criminologist Roy Walmsley, the world prisoner rate was approximately 158 per 100,000 population in 2007-2008. This figure indicates that at that time over ten million people were being held in penal institutions around the world, either as pre-trial detainees or after having been convicted.[4] According to informed estimates, the official Chinese numbers exclude 850,000 people in 'administrative detention' ordered by the prosecutors outside court procedures (Walmsley, 2008). If these estimated dark numbers of Chinese prisoners are added, the world total inmates can be estimated at 10.6 million. This amounts to the total population of a medium sized country such as Belgium or Portugal. It means that the global prisoner rate is circa 166 per 100,000 people.

Because many prisoners stay in prison for less than one year, the total number of persons admitted into a prison in the course of a year (admission rate), is higher than the number incarcerated at any date. In many countries, the prison admission rate is three times higher than the prisoner rate. The total number of people admitted to prisons per year can be estimated at 20 million worldwide.

Over the past three years prison populations have continued to grow in many parts of the world. Prison populations have risen in 71% of countries included in the World Prison List. The largest

[4] Data on prison populations from the UN Crime Surveys and from other international sources as well as from national prison administrations can be found in the World Prison List (maintained by Roy Walmsley of King's College, University of London (www.prisonstudies.org) (Walmsley, 2008). Figures in the latest World Prison List are for 2007 up to early December 2008.

prison populations according to now available data, are to be found in China (2.4m including pretrial detainees and those in 'administrative detention'), the USA (2.29m in 2008), Russian Federation (0.89m), Brazil (0.44m), India (0.37m), Mexico (0.22m), Thailand (0.17m in 2005), South Africa (0.16m) and Iran (0.166m).

Imprisonment is, besides capital punishment, the most severe form of punishment. The rates of prisoners per 100,000 population can be used as a proxy indicator of the punitiveness of national criminal justice systems. Table 2 shows the national prisoner rates per 100,000 of selected countries.

Table 2 - World ranking according to number of prisoners per 100,000 population in 2004-2006 (latest available)
(source: World Prison Population List (seventh edition, King's College London, UK, 2007)

15 countries with high rates

1	United States	701	6	Belize	459	11	Bahamas, The	410
2	Russian Fed.	606	7	Suriname	437	12	South Africa	402
3	Belarus	554	8	Dominica	420	13	Thailand	401
4	Kazakhstan	522	9	Ukraine	415	14	Kyrgyz Republic	390
5	Turkmenistan	489	10	Maldives	414	15	Singapore	388

15 countries with moderately high rates

18	Estonia	361	68	Mexico	156	75	Spain	138
27	Cuba	297	70	New Zealand	155	108	Germany	98
33	Tunesia	252	74	United Kingdom	141	130	Sweden	73
38	Iran	226	91	China (est. at 166)	117	134	Finland	70
39	Poland	218	92	Canada	116	151	Japan	53

15 countries with low rates

164	Congo, Rep.	38	169	Mali	34	174	Comoros	30
165	Guinea	37	170	Micronesia	34	175	Indonesia	29
166	Iceland	37	171	Nigeria	33	176	India	29
167	Sudan	36	172	Gambia, The	32	177	Nepal	29
168	Angola	36	173	Solomon Islands	31	178	Burkina Faso	23

At the country level, rates per 100,000 are highest in the US. In 2008, the rate has risen to 756. Other categories of corrections, such as parole and probation, show equally high figures in the US (Uggen, Manza, Thompson, 2006). High rates of prisoners are also found in countries of the former Soviet Union, such as Russia (606), Belarus (544), Kazakhstan (522) and Turkmenistan (489), as well as in Southern Africa (e.g. South Africa, 402) and the Caribbean (e.g. Bahamas, 410). In Asia, Thailand and Singapore stand out with comparatively high rates. At the low end stand countries in Western-Central Europe, Southern Europe, South Central Asia (e.g. India: 29 and Indonesia: 29) and Western Africa (e.g. Nigeria, 33).

Expanding use of imprisonment

Prison populations grew since the late 1980s in most parts of the world. Growth figures vary from 20% in Western Europe to 60% or more in the USA, Mexico, Brazil and Colombia. In the USA, the number of people incarcerated rose by 290% since 1980 (Waller, 2007). Rising crime rates may explain in part these movements in prison populations. In many countries rates of serious crimes have, however, been fairly stable or decreasing over the last ten years, as was the case in the USA and most European Countries. Part of the rise in the prison population is, therefore, attributed by experts to an increasing belief among sentencing decision makers that prison is preferable to its alternatives or perceived to be so by the public (Waller, 2007). Reviews of factors behind recent major increases in prison populations indicate that the growth is mainly the result of changes in sentencing policies: greater use of imprisonment, longer sentences and more restricted use of parole or conditional release (Walmsley, 2003).

In Eastern and Central European countries there was a marked increase in crime after the political transformations in the early 1990s and this seems to have resulted in the increased use of imprisonment. Since the mid-1990s, crime rates have been mainly stable while the prisoner rate continued to rise. One of the reasons for this could be that the public, media and subsequently the politicians continue to be alarmed by the increased level of crime, generating a generalized toughening of public attitudes towards offenders.

Theoretical explorations

Criminologists can use valid and reliable country data on crime and justice to test theories on the macro causes of crime and correlates of penal policies. Policy makers can use such information for the purpose of benchmarking their country's performance in terms of crime and crime control in an international perspective.

The results of the ICVS have, first of all, refuted the conventional notion of the USA as a high crime nation. Levels of common property crime and assaults in the USA lie below that of many European countries. Among Western nations, Australia, United Kingdom, The Netherlands and Ireland stand out with the highest prevalence of simple assaults. This position is associated with the highest consumption of beer in liters per head .In Southern Europe beer consumption is much lower and so are rates of victimization by assaults. USA shows moderate scores on beer consumption and simple assaults. It stands out, though, with comparatively high levels of assaults and robberies at gun point. International comparison suggests that the high rates of serious violence in the USA are linked to its uniquely high level of ownership of firearms, especially hand guns (Hepburn & Hemenway, 2004). In the USA over a third of all households own one or more firearms. Elsewhere in developed countries ownership rates range between 1% in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands to 4% in Australia and 11% in Canada.

Probably the most common theoretical notion on crime is that it is driven by social problems such as extreme poverty and economic inequality. This has always been one of the tenets of the milieu school, expressed in the famous citation of French criminologist Lacassagne that each society possesses the crime rate that it deserves (citation needed). Available empirical evidence for the poverty-crime link seems, however, mixed. Support for this hypothesis can be found in the high rates of violent crime and robberies in many of the largest cities in Africa and South America.

Some of the poorer Asian nations, however, such as India, Philippines and Indonesia, belong to the safest places on earth. The low crime situation in metropoles, such as Djakarta and Bombay, flies in the face of the poverty-crime link. Among the developed countries variations in crime levels in 2004/2005 do not fit the hypothesis either. The ten countries with the highest rates of common crime comprise several very affluent countries, such as Switzerland, Ireland and Iceland. Trends in crime over time also put into question conventional wisdom about poverty as the main driver of common crime. In the Western world crime booms seem to have been propelled by the increased opportunities of crime created by post war economic growth (Felson & Cohen,1979) rather than by economic slumps. Recent crime booms in Switzerland, Ireland and Iceland are cases in point. These three countries have each in recent years undergone rapid economic growth.

Considering the poverty-crime link, many are concerned about the impact of the current financial and economic crisis on levels of crime. In our view, the drop in property crime of recent years was caused by improved self-protection by potential victims in response to increased risk awareness (Van Dijk, 1997). The economic crisis may persuade people to be even more careful with their possessions and thereby curtail opportunities of crime. Through this mechanism the crisis may sustain rather than disturb the ongoing drop in crime.

Levels of organized crime are unrelated to levels of common crime. A high degree of urbanization is associated with high levels of common crime, but not of organized crime. The variation across nations of organized crime requires a separate explanation. International data reveal that high levels of organized crime almost invariably go together with ill-functioning state institutions and economic stagnation. These universal findings suggest that organized crime, bad governance and poverty are mutually reinforcing forces. Organized crime tends to erode the integrity of those holding a public office, including those responsible for upholding the rule of law. Through the pervasive bias of legislation, policy decisions and jurisprudence, market efficiencies are undermined and both local and foreign investors lose confidence in the legal and regulatory functions of the state and stay away. Many developing countries are trapped in vicious cycles of rampant organized crime, grand corruption and lack of investment. These insights from comparative international criminology underline the vital importance of the rule of law in the advancement of sustainable economic growth. To promote sustainable development, developing countries and countries with economies in transition should follow the striking examples of prosperous nations, such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Botswana. These model countries have all grounded their economic policies on well-functioning security and justice sectors with special attention for anti-graft commissions.

Finally, the striking variation in national imprisonment rates are often used as a direct measure of the severity of sentencing in a country. Actually, they may also be the result of higher levels of serious crime and/or the outcome of more effective action in solving such crimes and bringing to justice those who have committed them. When interpreting prisoner's rates, it is important to take into account the seriousness of the national crime problem. Homicide rates are a reliable indicator of the overall level of violent and organized crime in a country. In order to put the national imprisonment rates in perspective, Van Dijk (2007) related the imprisonment rates per 100,000 population to the rates of homicides per 100,000 population. These data allow nations to benchmark their imprisonment rate with those of countries that experience similar homicide rates. For example, the USA, a country housing a quarter of the world's total prison population, ranks first on imprisonment and 46th on homicide rates. Possible candidate countries for a benchmarking exercize would be Australia and Finland whose homicide rates are roughly similar (rankings of 59 and 64 respectively) but whose rankings on prisoners rates are incomparably lower (64 and 95) than the top position of the USA. Homicide rates are not dramatically lower in The United Kingdom or Spain either, two other countries with much lower imprisonment rates. Benchmarking with these countries might provide usefull insights for the USA. If the USA would

move somewhat in the direction of the prisoner rates of a country, such as the United Kingdom, such policy would potentially produce savings of several tens of billions of government expenditures per year. The benchmarking will, among other things, reveal that levels of (serious) crime are falling in these reference countries as fast as in the USA. They seem as succesful as the USA in controlling or reducing crime, while maintaining much lower prisoner rates. Such benchmarking might also be of interest to countries with medium high prisoner rates, such as the United Kingdom. It seems interesting to examine in more detail and depth why the United Kingdom ranks 52 on prisoner rates and Sweden 92, while the UK homicide rates are lower than those of Sweden.

Using ICVS data on victimization, fear of crime and public attitudes, Norris (2010) has investigated which nations are most similar in terms of crime and justice measures. His results confirm that an existing typology of nations applied in studies of public administration, the Family of Nations Typology, is applicable to the domain of crime and justice. Anglophone nations form a distinct cluster characterized by, inter alia, moderately high crime rates and high punitiveness. Other distinct clusters are the Nordic countries, including Austria and Switzerland and the mid continental European countries. As in previous analyses, Japan, with its low victimization rates and high punitiveness, was found to be an outlier.

In a focussed analysis of the correlates of punitiveness, Van Kesteren (2009) has shown that on a global scale high punitiveness is strongly related to economic inequality. The latter factor explains why the cluster of Anglophone countries is characterised by high punitiveness. The uniqueness of the Anglophone countries in terms of crime and justice seems somehow related to their comparatively high degrees of economic inequality.

In the coming years more international statistics on crime and justice will become available. The United Nations are committed to continue its regular worldwide collection of statistics on inter alia homicides and human trafficking and on the operation of criminal justice systems. A new round of the ICVS will be conducted in 2010/2011. In Europe, the European Union has started to publish harmonised statistics on police-recorded crimes (Tavares, Thomas, 2008) and is preparing the launch of a regular standardised victimization survey in all 27 member states. Theoretical reflection on these new sources of information on crime and justice in an international perspective is still in its infancy. The utilization of the data sources listed poses a challenge to criminologists willing to think out of the box of established realities and policies of their home countries.

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Research questions

Based on similarities and differences in the *crime and justice profiles* of your home country and one or more other nations of interest, using common crime, organized crime and level of imprisonment, what could these countries learn from each other?

Why can statistics of police-recorded offences not be reliably used for comparisons of levels of crime across countries?

What are the main differences between developed countries (the North) and developing countries (the South) in terms of both common crime and organized crime? What are the possible explanations for the gap in security?

What is the relationship between affluence and level of common criminality at the country level, focussing on various world regions?

Identify nations suffering from homicide rates of the same magnitude as the USA with significantly lower prisoner rates. What are the possible explanations for the divergence in the level of imprisonment?